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The interval from 1930 to 1965 witnessed the disappearance of virtually all one- and two-teacher schools in 17 Southern and border states. Isolation and transportation difficulties prevent further consolidation of small schools in many of these states. A number of small schools still in existence are located in hospitals and correctional institutions, and hence are inaccessable to the general public. The advantages to be gained in terms of good equipment, well-trained teachers and well-kept buildings far outweigh the objections of impersonal treatment which are often voiced by opponents of consolidation. Consolidation usually allows increased individual attention plus all the advantages necessary in effectively educating the student of today. (DA)

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Oct. 5, 1966

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- Since 1930, the 11 states of the old Confederacy and six other states which border them have reduced the number of one-teacher schools within their boundaries from 49,583 to 1,393, the magazine Southern Education Report said today.

From Texas to Delaware and from Missouri to Florida, one-teacher schools are rapidly disappearing, in step with a national trend that has eliminated all but about 10,000 of the 200,000 such schools which existed in the United States 50 years ago. An article about today's "little red schoolhouse" was written by John Egerton for the October issue of the publication.

A recent survey of the 17 Southern and border states by correspondents of Southern Education Reporting Service indicates that decline of the one-teacher school has been quickened by urbanization, consolidation and desegregation. The SERS survey, in which the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools co-operated, also revealed that geographical isolation and transportation problems may prevent total elimination of the little schools for many years.

The one-teacher schools which remain in service are, for the most part, necessitated by geography. In Kentucky, for instance, all but nine of 422 such schools are in Appalachia, the mountainous eastern section of the state where consolidation is impeded by inadequate transportation. In addition to these schools, Kentucky also has 184 two- and three-teacher schools.

Kentucky's total of small schools is the highest among the states surveyed by SERS. At the other end of the scale is North Carolina, which reported only two one-teacher schools and 11 more with two teachers. Delaware, Georgia, South Carolina and Louisiana were the only other states reporting fewer than 10 one-teacher schools.

In Delaware, the State Board of Education has officially closed the last three one-teacher schools -- all of them in Amish neighborhoods -- but the citizens of the three affected districts voted unanimously (203-0) against consolidation at a special referendum last April, and that action, plus a supporting resolution from the state senate, has

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had the effect of delaying the state school board's order. In other states as well, opposition to closing of small and isolated schools has come primarily from parents.

Florida, which reported 19 one-teacher schools in 1964, also reported that 12 of those schools were "special" schools, located in hospitals, detention homes and other places not open to regular students. A report issued last June by the Florida state department of education said a preliminary check showed "only one one-teacher school (excluding the "special" schools) is still in operation this year." A few other states also include small hospital and prison schools in their statistics on one-teacher schools.

The other states in the SERS survey besides Kentucky which reported more than 100 one-teacher schools were Missouri (250), West Virginia (201) and Tennessee (160). Missouri education officials have announced their intention to eliminate all of the state's one-teacher schools, but they acknowledge that it will take time. The estimated number of such schools in Missouri this year is 200.

The state department of education in West Virginia is advocating "a comprehensive educational program for all youth and adults," and that program, says Supt. Rex M. Smith, practically requires a minimum enrollment of 175 pupils in the smallest elementary schools. The most difficult problem in operating one-teacher schools, Smith says, is keeping them staffed with adequately trained teachers.

In addition to its 160 one-teacher schools, Tennessee also had 261 two-teacher schools a year ago. Like Kentucky and West Virginia, Tennessee's large areas of mountain terrain make such schools a necessity.

That the one-teacher school is in rapid decline but still far from disappearing may be illustrated in Maryland. In 1923, Maryland had 1,496 such schools; in the next 20 years a statewide school consolidation movement absorbed all but about 200 of them. About 10 years after that, in 1955, Maryland reported only 24 one-teacher schools. Now, however, 10 of those schools are still in operation; six of them are in Dorchester County, which is half marshland with many isolated villages. Maryland's small number of one-teacher schools is now only a fraction of the former total -- six-tenths of 1 per cent, to be exact -- but conditions will probably dictate a continuation of that fraction for several years to come.

Texas, which has 5,818 public schools, estimates its one-teacher schools have been reduced to 47 (from more than 3,500 in 1930), and its two-teacher schools total an estimated 121. Mississippi, which once had about 2,900 one-teacher units, reported only 13 in the SERS survey, and Arkansas listed 37 one-teacher schools and 80 more with two teachers for its 1964-65 term. Arkansas had more than 3,100 one-teacher schools in 1930.

Both Alabama and Oklahoma listed 78 one-teacher schools in the survey, but Alabama's figures were for 1964-65 while Oklahoma reported its 78 schools are presently in operation.

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Oklahoma's accreditation standards have effectively eliminated many small schools, but state legislators representing rural districts have sometimes balked at the trend. Four years ago the state's voters turned down a proposal that would have eliminated all elementary school districts and made them part of larger school units.

In 1964-65, Virginia had 54 one-teacher schools, 91 with two teachers, and 73 more with three teachers. There, too, the trend is toward rapid reduction of the number of small schools, and educators in Virginia, like most others contacted in the survey, seem happy to see them go. "So far as I know, professional educators do not discuss the advantages or disadvantages of such schools," one department of education official said, "assuming perhaps that only necessity keeps them in operation. Obviously, the same necessity will leave them poorly equipped, and staffed, for better or worse, by someone living close."

The most serious deficiencies of one- and two-teacher schools are frequently mentioned by schoolmen in all the states -- isolation, poorly trained teachers, out-of-date or nonexistent equipment, dilapidated buildings. Less often described are the few virtues which have kept the schools afloat. In a time when there is controversy over the concept of neighborhood schools, the tiny community school is defended by some who see consolidation as too impersonal. And such ideas as team teaching, nongraded instruction and the use of older students to help in the teaching of younger ones, far from being "innovations" in any literal sense, are characteristics that have been a necessary part of the one-room school effort for decades. Even individualized instruction could be said to be more feasible in a one-room school of 15 pupils than, say, in a third-grade class of 30.

But almost all educators are in agreement that the disadvantages of the small and poorly equipped rural school far outweigh the advantages. There is a widely held belief that consolidation can adopt the qualities of the one-teacher school and add the other advantages that are necessary for an effective school program.

Number of One-Teacher Schools in 17 Southern and Border States

	1930	1965
Alabama	2,896	78 *
Arkansas	3,141	37 *
Delaware	178	3
Florida	946	19 *
Georgia	3,522	4
Kentucky	6,089	422
Louisiana	1,381	9 *
Maryland	1,024	10
Mississippi	2,897	13 *
Missouri	7,352	250
North Carolina	2,096	2 +
Oklahoma	2,600	78 +
South Carolina	1,791	6 *
Tennessee	3,091	160
Texas	3,525	47
Virginia	2,765	54 *
West Virginia	4,289	201
TOTAL	49,583	1,393

Data for 1930 taken from a survey on school district organization published by the American Association of School Administrators and the Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association.

Data for 1965 gathered by correspondents of Southern Education Reporting Service and by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In a few instances the figures given are estimates.

* Data for 1964-65 school year.

\+ Data for 1966-67 school year.

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